

# Why did *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, made specifically for television, come to home video first?

Ian Horner reports

The USS Enterprise and its new crew are boldly going where no man has gone before and TV executives around the world are outraged.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Gene Roddenberry's new *Star Trek* series, is an unexpected hit on US TV but you still won't see it on Australian TV for a while.

For the past year CIC-Taft has been releasing the new *Star Trek* on double-episode video cassettes, a practice which has earned the ire of the TV industry worldwide.

Glen Kinging, programme writer for the Seven network in Australia told this writer: "We're disappointed that it did not come straight to television but it was the producers decision. We know that the video release of major movies can affect their rating potential because so many viewers have seen them.

"We telecast the (old) *Star Trek* series and the movies and Paramount have indicated the new show will be offered to us when it's available. As long as we pay whatever the going rate is at that stage, one would expect the series to come to us."

But he would rather not get it the long way round.

The new show also went straight to video in Paramount TV's other key international territories - Japan, France, Germany, Scandinavia and Great Britain. This is the only way the producers could recoup the enormous budget.

The simple facts are that each new *Star Trek* episode is costing \$A1.8 million, whereas an *ALF* episode costs a mere \$550,000 while, theoretically, anyone with \$785,000 can churn out an episode of *The Cosby Show*. But first-run TV sales of the new *Star Trek* in the US have netted only \$1.1 million per episode (which is still a record).

It's in syndication in the US because it was rejected by the major networks, just like NBC rejected the original pilot for the old *Star Trek*. But NBC ordered a second pilot for the old show, which was unheard of at the time.

However, the first episode of the new *Star Trek*, *Encounter At Far Point*, was so popular when it was screened the show

was picked up for a second season before the second episode went to air, which is also unheard of.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation* is now showing on 210 stations in the US and consistently rates in the top three.

Paramount TV sought out additional sources of revenue so they wouldn't have to cut the budget.

The shortfall eventually will be made up by international first-run TV sales, which will nett \$275,000 per episode, plus longterm rights for repeats, which will trickle in at the rate of about \$150,000 per show, plus worldwide video rights, which makes up the outstanding \$275,000. And then the producers will have only broken even.

Said George Mooratoff, vice-president of Paramount TV in Australia: "That's

what people don't understand! They're criticising us but we're virtually subsidising TV stations around the world so they can make their own local product.

"It costs up to \$100,000-plus to make an hour-long episode of a local show in Australia but the current price for one-run, four-city rights (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide) to an hour of international television is \$19,000."

This breaks down to about \$6,800 each for Sydney and Melbourne, and \$2,700 for each of the others.

However, there will be no video profits if it goes to TV first because fans will be able to tape their own copies.

Said Ken Chapman, Australian managing director of CIC Video: "Where do we generate rentals if people are getting the series on TV? It has to be like feature films which go theatrically, then to video, then to television. This exploits a product's potential without bastardising it but the reverse is not true (ie, going to TV before video)."

Will the video release weaken its TV potential? Glen Kinging said it must.

"It has to have some effect, obviously. How much I wouldn't know. This was the first time. Movie pilots have gone out to video but we've never had a whole series. It's new ground. We've never experienced this before," he said.

"Obviously we'd prefer all this not to happen. We can understand the producers' situation because of their budget but it would be nice if the market it's being made for could afford to pay more so the rest of the world wouldn't have to hold up so long.

"By the time we get it, who knows, there's the potential that interest will have waned some. You've had all the publicity out from America which would have helped the video release but not necessarily the television release because that was a couple of years away.

"All these things we don't know. It's new ground, we haven't been there before."

Which is just what *Star Trek* is all about, of course.

- Ian Horner.

